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Summary: Patrick never really wanted a baby brother. He didn't care if his parents had two, three, five, or even fifty new babies; all he cared about was how his meals never came on time anymore, and why he couldn't sleep at night any longer.

The Replacement

Patrick Hockstetter was born on the 23rd July, 1946. His younger brother Avery, was born just five years later in October 1951. Mr and Mrs Hockstetter couldn't be more pleased with the family they had raised - Patrick was a very handsome boy (maybe verging on the pudgy side, but who cares?) at the age of five, and Avery received lots of attention at the ladies club, being called the cutest baby in the whole of Derry. From the outside, they looked like a perfectly happy family; normal, loving, care-free and attentive. Many people admired them, especially the other young women at the local ladies club Josephine Hockstetter attended, and some even called them sublime.

Of course, like any family, they had their flaws. Nobody could imagine the disaster brewing beneath the surface of the Hockstetter family. Underneath those smiles lay something disturbing - most notably in the eldest son, Patrick.

That boy was later to be discovered as a Sociopath verging on Psychopathy. His parents weren't to know until just after his twelfth birthday in the summer of 1958. Every day, he would take great joy in stabbing the beetles outside with his mother's sewing needles, or, perhaps slowly watching flies dying slowly after being sprayed with poisonous chemicals. Each kill gave him a satisfaction normal childhood activities could never fulfil. Each kill made the world seem not so black and white anymore. His heart would race, his eyes would turn buggy, and sweat would bead on his forehead as he watched the grasshopper curl up feebly in its last throws of agony. Surprisingly, in Patrick's case, killing people came much before killing animals, something unusual in the world of Psychopaths. He had a very dizzy grip on reality, only viewing the world from his own perspective and believing himself to be the only "real" being in existence.

Patrick's brother never made it past the early stages of childhood. It wouldn't take a genius to guess why; however, Avery was diagnosed with unexplained crib death syndrome whilst his hysterical mother wailed and refused to be comforted. Only the father came close to brushing past the truth. Before the thought had even registered, as

blue and red florescent lights from the ambulance coursed the parlour, Ronald Hockstetter could only watch in despair as his wife sobbed against the wall, clutching at her hair and kicking the skirting in her own open tantrum. Inspecting the obvious serene aura Patrick was displaying despite all the chaos in the family home, what with all the paramedics and Josephine's hysteria, the man watched as he was handed a single white pill — the doctors obviously thinking he was still in shock from finding his baby brother dead. In the midst of it all, instead of distracting his wife from pulling her hair out, he stormed from the room, slamming the door so hard it splintered in its frame. Patrick simply watched the whole world go by, swinging his legs cheerfully and sipping on a root beer.

When Avery was born, everything went out of whack. Patrick's schedule was ruined, he never got his meals on time and he couldn't sleep at night for the constant crying. Strong, not-so-cheerful emotions stabbed at his heart like tiny, persistent needles whenever he saw his mother cradling Avery in her arms, or perhaps his father giving him a brief smile before rushing down to work. The green-eyed monster consumed him entirely, and before he knew it, his only brother was gone...

Feeling unloved and unwanted, Patrick had trailed to the bus shelter with a heavy heart. Usually his mother would escort him to the shelter. Not today, though. She was too busy fussing over Avery. Patrick knew.

Thoughts of being replaced filled his young brain like angry hornets in a broken hive. Delusions after delusions whipped around as violent and cold as the December wind on his pallid cheeks. The child almost considered running away, just before realising, that way, his brother would have beaten him before he even knew it.

Waiting for the bus as a snowstorm was about to start up, Patrick risked a glance back at the front porch, almost although saying a final goodbye to his childhood home. His green eyes widened as he caught sight of his mother standing bare-footed on the frosty planks of wood, hugging herself for warmth and shaking so hard she looked although she had caught hypothermia.

'Patrick?' she called, eyes narrowing to find her boy without her

spectacles, 'You forgot your scarf, Patrick. I don't want you to catch your death.'

'I don't want it,' Patrick said darkly, his tone hardly above a whisper.

His mother, of course, didn't hear and yelled harder, 'Patrick, come get your scarf, sweetie!'

Patrick ignored her this time and simply clenched his little hands into fists. *It's too late for that, mommy,* he thought, *you already replaced me. It's all your fault.*

The bus collected the boy and his disheartened mother retreated back inside, wrapping her hands inside the red wool to warm them. Never for a second did the woman pick up that her son was angry at her. Nor did she know that the cuddle she had with Avery this morning would be the last he'd ever have.

'Children, I want you to tidy up all the mess you've made, now,' Mrs Black, the kindergarten teacher, said to all the five year olds in her care.

Around the tall woman, it looked although World War III had started and she was the lone survivor. A few good little girls began to scout about the room, picking up hurled rag dolls and train sets left by the boys. Soon enough, the children began to clear up the mess, all except one. Patrick.

He sat crouched and hunched over in the corner, almost although he were in a lot of pain. Mrs Black started to pet Patrick on the head, thinking something had happened at home to upset him, or perhaps he wasn't feeling too well, but the boy gave her such a ferocious look that made her pull back her hand before she might have lost it. His little mouth was pulled down at the corners, and his eyes had something in them that made his teacher's heart feel although an icy fist had seized it. Inside the dusty swirls of green and grey, there was no sparkle, no light that assured of life, and certainly no happiness nor hope.

The usually pale skin had a sickly pallor to it and his hands trembled either side of his small body. Noticing that his teacher was watching

him, Patrick withdrew his hands from the floor and put one of them in his mouth and sucked it, his eyes the whole time in a glower trained at Mrs Black. When she once again attempted to get closer, he scuttled back although fearing she would hurt him. With his back pressed against the wall, his unblinking eyes moved away from Black (much to her relief) and fell on a group of girls tidying.

'Patrick?' she asked quietly, 'Is everything okay?'

He ignored her, but went back to glaring in her direction.

'Are you sick?'

He continued to suck on his hand.

'Do you want me to call your mommy?'

'No!' he yelled suddenly, his voice anguished. The pure rage on his face was frightening.

'Patrick,' she said, her voice in what you'd call a "warning tone", 'Don't speak to your teacher that way...'

Her hard tone didn't match the softened features of her face nor the gentle sympathy in her gaze. *Ah, so that's where the problem lies*, she thought sadly. There was nothing she could do but let him be. The look on his face clearly said he wouldn't co-operate either way. She let him do his own thing until home time.

'I'm home, mom,' came a quiet little voice from the hallway. The voice was so quiet, in fact, that it didn't even make the sleeping baby stir.

A reply never came (his mother was napping in her own room after the bad night she'd had with Avery) so Patrick poured himself a glass of milk and a plate of cookies all by himself. The anger from earlier in the morning wasn't forgotten, not even for a second; and the fact that his mother wasn't there to greet him after school just deepened the upset between mother and son.

With a pout on his lips, Patrick flung himself down on the sofa besides his younger brother, the milk slopping over the edge of the

glass and down his shirt. He threw his wet wellington boots onto the floor and curled up his legs underneath him. Not even a muscle twitched from Avery. Patrick's moody eyes fell to his younger sibling, watching the slow rise and fall of his tiny chest, the shallow noises he made when he breathed, and the warm puffs of air he made in the stone cold sitting area.

Patrick leaned a little closer. Before he knew what he was doing, Avery was dead. The deed was done. No more meals late on time. No more being kept up late at night. Avery was gone. Patrick wouldn't be replaced after all... And the cheap thrill he got from murder inspired the boy to keep right on killing; beetles, katydids, cicadas, flies, mice, rabbits, dogs, cats... Patrick never stopped killing.